Ingredient Substitutions for Japanese Cooking

DISCUSSION

Do you struggle with Japanese cooking because you don't have a certain ingredient in your kitchen? Or have you discovered a delicious recipe you wish to make, but do not live near a Japanese or Asian market? Or maybe you're on a specific diet? In this post, you'll find suggestions for ingredient substitution and some really useful resources for Japanese cooking.

Before we start, you can learn about the most basic Japanese essential ingredients to cook Japanese dishes at home. You can also browse my pantry pages to learn more about each ingredient.

Resources for Japanese Ingredients

Depending on where you live in the world, I recommend looking up online stores to see if you can find the ingredients first, especially for cooking authentic Japanese flavors. Here are some quick resources:

- ONLINE STORES for Asian ingredients
- Local Japanese Grocery Stores Around the World
- Our SHOP page

KONNICHIWA & WELCOME!

I'm Nami, a Japanese home cook based in San Francisco. Have fun exploring the 700+ classic & modern Japanese recipes I share with step-by-step photos and How-To YouTube videos.

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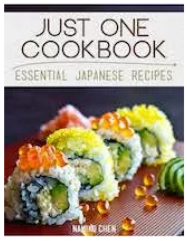

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Also, major grocery stores are starting to carry more Japanese and Asian ingredients these days due to the popularity of Japanese cuisine. So, do check in with the stores once in a while and you may be in luck.

INGREDIENT SUBSTITUTIONS FOR JAPANESE COOKING

When all else fails and you find yourself having to look for substitutions, you can use the list below as your guide. Please be aware that not all substitutions are going to yield the authentic Japanese flavors you're looking for, but they will allow you to enjoy Japanese dishes at home nonetheless.

For my recipes on Just One Cookbook, I often include more suggestions for fresh ingredients in the write-up where you can work with local ingredients you can access. And don't be afraid to experiment and try things out.

If you wish to learn more about the specific ingredient, click on the link and it will lead you to a more thorough article on the uses, storage, and shopping. Otherwise, you'll find your quick answers below.

Condiments

Dashi (Japanese stock):

Dashi is the fundamental of Japanese cooking and without it, you can't produce authentic flavors. The good thing is dashi is super easy and simple to prepare (just need 30 minutes or less). All you need is water, *kombu* (edible kelp) or/and dried bonito flakes (*katsuobushi*). You can choose one of 3 ways to make dashi.

If you are vegetarian, make Kombu Dashi or Shiitake Dashi. You can use dashi packet (tea bag style) to cut down on time. Learn more about different types of dashi here.

Mirin (Sweetened Sake):

Suggested substitution: 1 Tbsp mirin = 1 Tbsp water (or sake) + 1 tsp sugar

Sake (Japanese Rice Wine):

Suggested Substitution: Dry sherry, Chinese or Korean rice wine, or water

** Click here to learn more about Sake and Mirin (and benefits of cooking with them)*

Miso (Japenese Fermented Soybean Paste):

Unfortunately, there is no substitute for the flavor of miso. Korean Doenjang (soybean paste) can't be used as they have a different taste.

Rice Vinegar:

Suggested substitution: White vinegar (more tangy and stronger) or apple cider vinegar (mild, but it has a faint apple flavor). You may want to use less for what the recipe calls for or dilute with some water.

Soy Sauce:

Suggested Substitution: Gluten-free soy sauce makes a better substitution, but you can use coconut aminos.

Dry Ingredients

Japanese Short Grain Rice:

We do not recommend using Jasmine rice to substitute with Japanese rice. The closest replacement would be Korean rice. Please click on the title to read more about Japanese rice where we talk about the differences and what brands of rice to buy.

Panko:

Suggested Substitution: Regular American breadcrumbs, but it will be less flaky and light

Potato starch:

Suggested Substitution: Corn starch

Meat + Fish + Protein

Thinly sliced meat:

Follow this tutorial with video to slice your own thinly sliced meat with good quality meat. We often use thinly sliced meat for cooking shabu shabu and sukiyaki.

Kamaboko (Fish Cake):

Suggested substitution: Use similar fish cakes found in Asian grocery stores. Or leave out and use fresh white fish fillet/ shrimp that would work for hot pot and noodle soup recipes.

Produce (Fresh Vegetables)

Daikon:

Suggested substitution: For any simmered dishes, you can use turnips or other root vegetables that are available for a similar texture.

Gobo:

Suggested substitution: Any similar crunchy root vegetables.

Kabocha Squash:

Suggested substitution: Butternut squash or acorn squash, however, they are less sweet than kabocha. For baking, you can also mix in sweet potato with butternut squash if the recipe calls for kabocha squash.

Lotus root (Renkon):

Suggested substitution: Any similar crunchy root vegetables. You may find lotus roots in Chinese or Korean grocery stores.

Mitsuba:

Suggested substitution: Unfortunately, there is no herb that tastes like mitsuba. The texture of the mitsuba stems is very similar to one of the cilantro. You can sprinkle some chopped cilantro (use stem part more than leafy part). Please use green onion/scallion or chives to garnish your dish. For recipes such as salads or rice dishes, you may replace mitsuba with arugula or watercress (chop it up).

Negi/Long Green Onion:

Suggested substitution: You can use leeks for the texture or use more green onions/scallions. The texture is similar to leeks but the taste is similar to green onions/scallions.

Nagaimo:

Suggested substitution: Grated potato can be used for grated nagaimo.

Shiso:

Suggested substitution: Unfortunately, there is no herb that tastes like shiso. The closest substitute is perilla leaf which you can get from a Korean grocery store.

Japanese Sweet Potato (Satsumaimo):

Suggested substitution: You can use American sweet potato (more orange color), but it'll be less sweet. Adjust the sweetness with sugar, mirin, or other alternatives.

I hope I've covered most of the important ingredients for Japanese cooking. If you have a question or have a suggestion for any of the ingredients above, please do not hesitate to leave a message here. We welcome your feedback and input anytime!

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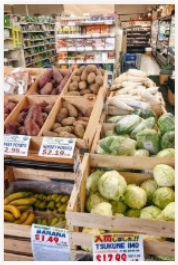

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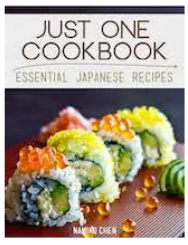

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